The Wrack Line

Newsletter of Parker River National Wildlife Refuge • Newburyport, MA

United States Fish & Wildlife Service — Fall, 2014

Meet Bill Peterson, Parker River's New Refuge Manager

By Bill Peterson, Refuge Manager

What does the Great Marsh have in common with a Mississippi Delta swamp? That's one of the many questions I've asked myself after moving my family halfway across the country three weeks ago to Parker River NWR. Fortunately, the trip went smoothly and we arrived several days ahead of the moving truck. There was no debate on how to spend our first full day in New England; we reacquainted ourselves with the coast.

One of my earliest memories is catching fiddler crabs and looking for shark teeth on the beaches near my childhood home in South Carolina. Later, my family moved to Minnesota, where I spent my youth trapping muskrats, canoeing, and spying on nesting geese near the stream behind our home. Those formative experiences instilled my love of nature, which led to a career in conservation. Along the path to Parker River, I've had valuable opportunities to work on conservation challenges from the prairies of Saskatchewan to the Mississippi Delta swamps of Arkansas.

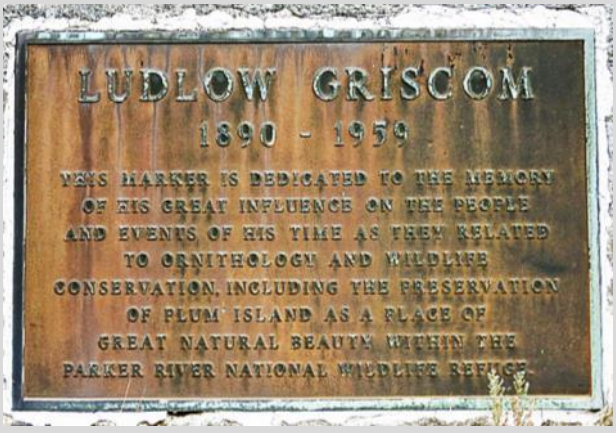
In the Mississippi Delta, the greatest challenge for conserving Wapanocca Lake was excessive sedimentation resulting from upstream soil erosion. This process impacted the entire community, from farmers losing topsoil during each storm, to residents affected by flooding along sediment-choked waterways, in addition to wildlife whose wetland habitat was rapidly filling in. The solution was to form a broad coalition of watershed farmers, local government entities, and other stakeholders to address our shared goal of reducing cropland soil erosion. We identified mutually acceptable strategies for preventing excessive erosion, secured US Dept. of Agriculture soil conservation funding, and are implementing those strategies to sustain the community and wildlife.

At Parker River, the greatest challenge for conserving the Great Marsh is ongoing sea level rise resulting from climate change. This threat has the potential to substantially reduce the extent of emergent marsh, impacting our community and wildlife. Again, the solution is for a broad coalition of stakeholders to continue identifying and implementing strategies for sustaining our wetland resource. I'm excited to begin working with refuge partners to insure that our grandchildren and wildlife have a healthy Great Marsh. Thanks to all who have welcomed me to Parker River!

Bill Peterson, Refuge Manager

Who was Ludlow Griscom?

Have you noticed the plaque (below) that lies along the Hellcat dune loop? Do you know who Ludlow Griscom was? Mr. Griscom (1890-1959) was nicknamed the "Dean of the Birdwatchers." He worked as an ornithologist, served as president of the Boston Museum of Science and director of Massachusetts Audubon, and was a strong advocate for the establishment of Parker River National Wildlife Refuge. Griscom convinced the scientific community that birds could be identified accurately by "field markings," including size and shape, songs and calls, and behavior. This was a bold step away from the established practice of shooting birds to identify them "in the hand" and opened the study of birds to every interested observer.

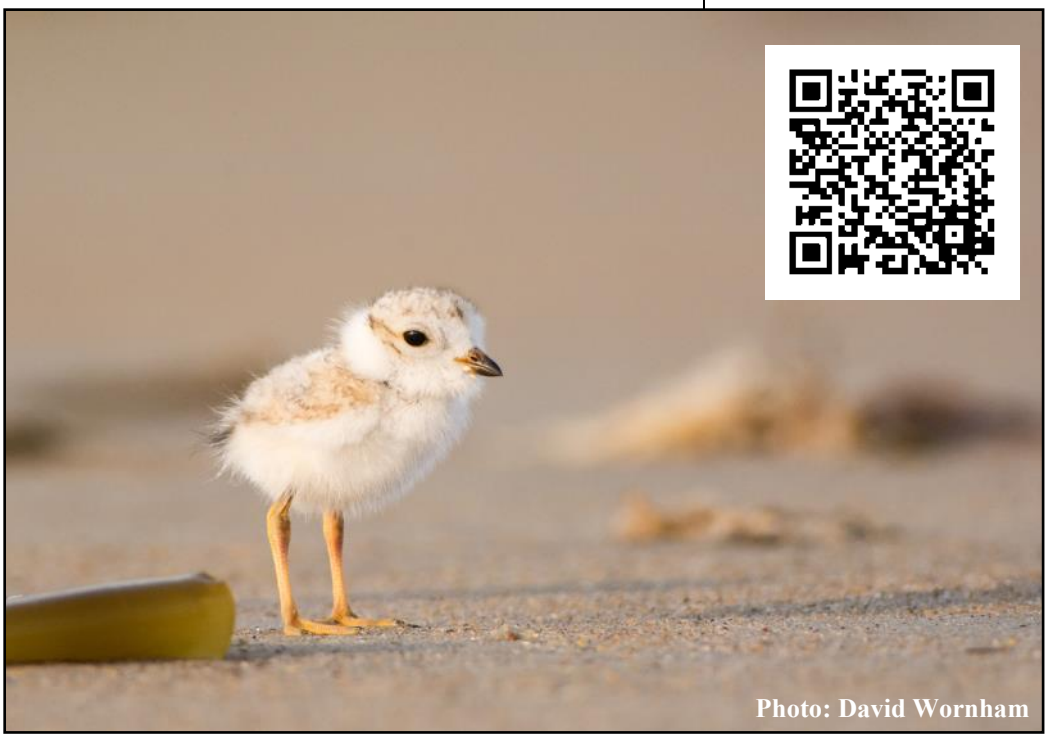


2014: Best Plover Year Yet!

By Kaytee Hojnacki, Biological Technician

This year proved to be one of the best years for piping plovers on Plum Island. Despite some early struggles due to crow and coyote predation, as well as high tide flooding, the plovers managed to fledge the highest number of chicks ever recorded on the island. This includes not only the refuge beach, but also Sandy Point and the Newburyport Town Beach, both currently monitored by Massachusetts Audubon. On the refuge beach, we determined that throughout the summer, we had a total of 31 pairs attempt to nest, with 24 of those pairs hatching chicks. From those, 60 chicks survived to fledging (being able to fly).

The refuge's pair and fledgling count has steadily risen over the past five years, thanks to our careful monitoring and management. As these birds are highly susceptible to disturbance and predation during the nesting season, they benefit immensely from the closed beach and targeted predator management. And while fencing-off only certain sections of the beach for plover nesting works at other locations (Sandy Point, the town beach, and Crane Beach), the narrow nature of the refuge beach does not allow us to do that. In addition, on our beach, the areas the plovers and terns prefer are also those spots also preferred by our visitors, which is a conflict that plovers would lose every time. For this reason, the refuge beach will continue to be closed each summer for the foreseeable future, even as plover numbers inch upward. And this also means you might catch a peek of plovers from the boundaries!



Piping plover chicks thrived on the refuge beaches in 2014.

Tajuan joins the Service's Maintenance Action Team

Parker River maintenance worker, Tajuan Levy (second from the right), in the field with the MAT crew.

By Tajuan Levy, Facility Operations Manager

The Maintenance Action Team (MAT) has played a critical role in completing much needed maintenance projects throughout the U.S. Fish and Wildlife's Northeast region, while at the same time cutting costs and saving money. The Service also uses the MAT team as a training platform for employees like me. This allows us to continually build in-house capacity and resources to complete critical maintenance projects. I just completed my first MAT project at Lake Umbagog NWR in Maine. I learned a lot and got to train on different pieces of heavy equipment (a 4-wheel loader and 3 different dump trucks). If you complete enough hours on the equipment during the two week period, the heavy equipment coordinator can approve your certification for the various machines. The project was to re-gravel 2 miles of road, build 4,000 ft of new road and replace about 15 culverts. The projects are planned for an intense 2 weeks, 10 hour days, and 7 days a week. But, on the plus side, you meet different people, learn to operate different equipment, and help the service and refuge save money.

Boat Wreck on Refuge Beach

By Christopher Husgen, Federal Wildlife Officer

On his third time ever in a boat, a Massachusetts man came to a bumpy stop on a Tuesday night in early September. He had spent the day with his wife, in his recently acquired 25 foot boat, at Crane's Beach in Ipswich. On his return trip at about 8 pm in the dark, he turned sharply towards the Refuge Beach thinking that he was entering the mouth of the Merrimack River; the Merrimack is more than two miles to the north.

Although the boat was equipped with radar, GPS, and depth sounding electronics, the new boat operator was unfamiliar with their use. Any one of those devices, when working properly, would have provided enough information to keep him away from the beach, but he met the sand with a thud. Night fishermen on the refuge beach, with the assistance of Newbury Police, helped the family to safety.

The next day I met with the man, investigated the accident, and assisted with the removal of the boat. It was a devastating loss for the new boater, but fortunately, he was very responsive in arranging to remove the wreckage promptly, and there was virtually no environmental damage. It was convenient for the removal operation that the boat came to rest adjacent to where the drive-on fishing access road spills out onto the beach.

It took great effort to remove the heavily damaged boat from the water and the beach.

It took about four hours to load the boat on the trailer, and pull it all off of the beach. Sand and water had filled the bilge area, and until much of it was removed, the excavator could not lift the boat to position if properly. Fortunately, no one was hurt, and the debris was removed.

There is a long history of shipwrecks on Plum Island and the refuge, dating back to the 1600s. Even with modern equipment, these incidents continue to occur about once a year on the Refuge. Mother Nature continues to humble us, and one should not underestimate her effects!

Connecting People with Wildlife: A Biologist's Perspective

By Nancy Pau,
Wildife Biologist

A young "Biologist-in-training" helps wildlife biologist Nancy Pau release newly banded shorebird.

Photo: FWS

On September 6th many people around the world commemorated the first "World Shorebird Day," a special day launched to celebrate the amazing small birds that fly thousands of miles each year. At Parker River NWR, we are actively researching shorebird migration by banding and radio-tracking these birds along their migration routes. In celebration of World Shorebird Day, we invited visitors to our banding operation for an opportunity to see and appreciate these amazing birds "up close and personal."

So, on a beautiful fall weekend, a group of bird researchers gathered together, many volunteering their time for the day. They opened up the banding operation: catching and measuring shorebirds, and placing color flags and radio-telemetry tags on them so that we can track where they go.

We were joined by two Refuge volunteers, Alice and Gary Lavimoniere, who met and guided the visitors to our banding operation in the Bill Forward Impoundment, filling them in on the importance of the ongoing research.
The event went beautifully and we were able to share these special shorebirds with 45 visitors. What surprised me was how emotional the bird banders, myself included, got in teaching about shorebirds to a captivated audience. As a wildlife researcher, being able to work with wildlife is always a special treat; but being able to give a visitor a personal connection to wildlife was such a joy. As we finished working with each bird, we placed them in the hand of a waiting visitor. The look of delight and wonder in their face as the bird flew away will forever remain in my memory. This day has reminded me that while we work to conserve wildlife and their habitats, we're doing it so that this and future generations of Americans will continue to enjoy "National Geographic moments" with wildlife.

A Foot Trail with Links to the Past

By Matt Poole, Visitor Services Manager

The 1000+ acre Great Bay National Wildlife Refuge is a landscape with many histories. First, in reverse temporal order, there's the present day national wildlife refuge that came into being in 1992 – made possible when Pease Air Force Base was closed – its "pieces" then divided up among a number of new landowners, including the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. During World War II the U.S. Navy based some of its operations on land that later became the air base. Leaping further back in time – indeed, way back to the early 1600's – the landscape was gradually settled by European immigrants. So began a several hundred year land use pattern that was largely characterized by farming and grazing. And, needless to say, the story of this particular landscape is not complete without mentioning the fact that different groups (or cultures) of native people, over time, moved through, used, and occupied the same lands (and waters).

One of the prior "land-users" of the Great Bay NWR landscape was recently honored when the former Ferry Way Trail was renamed the "William Furber Ferry Way Trail." As it turns out, the present day trail once served as a road that led to a commercial ferry operation that provided passage between Welsh Cove (on the refuge side) and Adams Point (site of UNH's Jackson Marine Lab). The ferry, established about 1694, was owned and operated by none other than a man by the name of William Furber. And the rest, as they say, is a simple matter of history!

Fast forward to 2014: the Furbers are still very much around! In fact, there is a Furber family organization – with members spread out across the U.S. One such member, a fellow from Maine named Lincoln Furber, had contacted former refuge manager Graham Taylor a number years ago

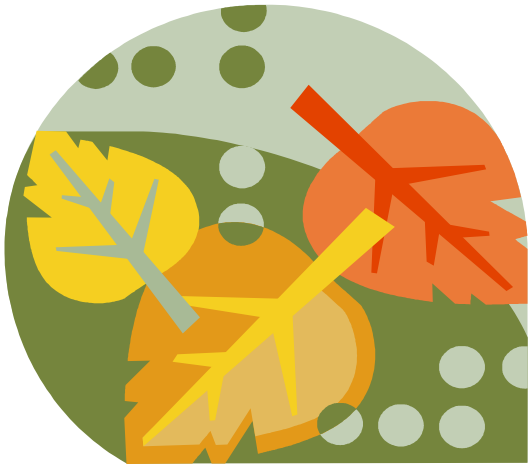
Members of the Furber family gather round to photo-document the commemoration.

Plaque commemorating the ferry owner.

to inquire about the possibility of renaming the trail in honor of William Furber. Taylor's response? "Sure, why not!"

And so it came to be on a beautiful sunlit Saturday morning last August when 40+ Furbers converged on Great Bay NWR in Newington, NH for a very modest trail renaming ceremony. Gathered round a small engraved monument located near the trail's observation deck (with views to Great Bay), acting manager Frank Drauszewski and Link Furber offered a few words to honor the memory of the ferry operator.

The William Furber Ferry Way Trail is the longer of two trails the public may explore at Great Bay NWR. The two mile loop meanders through a wetland, open fields, woods, and along the edge of Great Bay. A recently redesigned self-guided interpretive trail brochure is available at the trail-head and on the Great Bay web site: http://www.fws.gov/refuge/Great_Bay/visit/plan_your_visit.html.



No, it is not a reenactment of Hitchcock's "The Birds"…

It's the swallows preparing to migrate!

By Linda Schwartz, Refuge Volunteer

Tree swallows congregate in the sky above Parker River NWR.

One amazing spectacle at Parker River NWR, is the staging of swallows before they begin their migration to points south (such as South Carolina, Florida and the Gulf Coast and as far as Panama). If you have ever seen the sight of hundreds or thousands of swallows flying en masse you will never forget it. This staging takes place between July and early September and is worth the trip to see. Back in the eighties it was said that there may have been as many as a half million birds staging in the Plum Island area. Sadly, their numbers have decreased, but they are still a spectacle to witness. The coastal area around Plum Island and New Hampshire are a major stopping point for many swallows so they can fatten up before their journey. This gathering of swallows in the area was even noted in an anthology of poems- edited by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow - *Poems of Place*. The poem by Henry Henderson is titled *Parker River*.

Plum Island offers two things that these birds need; plenty of bugs and plenty of bayberries. Bayberry is a familiar scent for candles and the leaves may be substituted for bay leaves in cooking. The berries and the seeds of the northern bayberry bush are an important food source for swallows. The berries contain a high percentage of lipids (fat) and carbohydrates. The fat and carbohydrates they contain allow the swallows to put on fat in preparation for their migration. Tree swallows are one of the few species able to digest the waxy coating on these grayish, spherical berries. These bushes frequently grow in coastal areas.

Most of the swallows you will see in these flocks are young tree swallows, so they lack the metallic blue that the adults have. But they are still a sight to be seen as they fly through the sky with amazing speed and grace. Swallows are responsible for eating large numbers of insects and are therefore a very beneficial species. The swallow's large mouth is a very useful adaptation for capturing insects on the wing.

Tree swallows are the only North American swallow species that also eats berries. They will eat other berries as well. They are related to the larger swallow species, the purple martin, which you will see at the communal nest boxes (gourds) that are set up in parking lot 1 at the refuge. Tree swallows will sometimes make use of these nests as well.

While the presence of swallows is generally a very good thing, they can be a problem around airports such as JFK in New York. Because of the large numbers of birds gathering to consume the bayberries, the risk of birds coming into conflict with planes is quite high. In New York they have removed many of the bayberry bushes around JFK to avoid this problem. But at Parker River National Wildlife Refuge we welcome the swallows back every year!

<u>Author's Note</u>: I would like to thank Nancy Landry for pointing me in the right direction and Sue McGrath of Newburyport Birders and Douglas Chickering for their help on this article.

Wapack NWR: A Monadnock Region Jewel

View from the summit of North Pack Monadnock on the Wapack NWR.

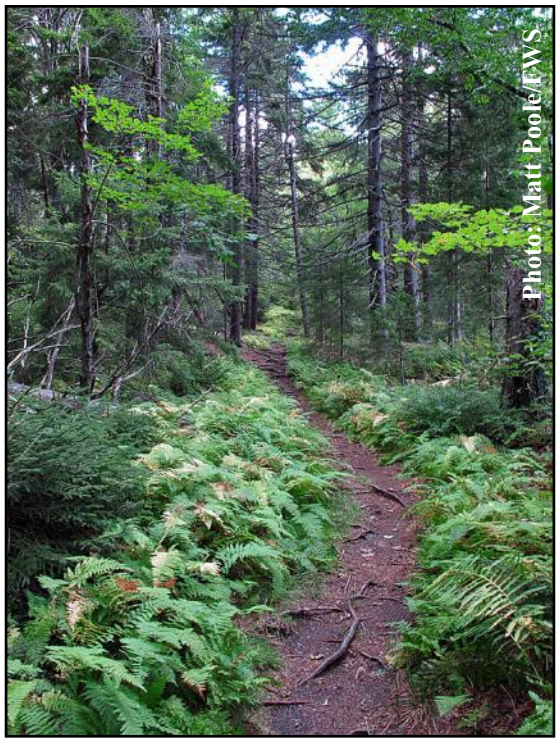
By Matt Poole, Visitor Services Manager

Did you know that not one but four national wildlife refuges are administered by the staff of Parker River NWR? One of these refuges – Wapack NWR – lies in the heart of the Monadnock Region of southwestern New Hampshire. Established in 1972, the 1672 acre refuge is the oldest unit of the National Wildlife Refuge System in the state of New Hampshire. The refuge was the result of a donation from Laurence and Lorna Marshall – a donation that required the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to manage the refuge for its intrinsic "wilderness quality" and value to wildlife.

Wapack is a great place to observe and photograph wildlife and their habitats. The refuge is a popular hawk migration area and provides nesting habitat for numerous migratory songbirds such as the tree sparrow, Swainson's thrush, magnolia warbler, crossbills, pine grosbeaks and white-throated sparrow. Deer, bear, coyote, fisher, fox, mink and weasel – or evidence of their presence – may be encountered on the refuge.

Now, if you know anything about Mount Monadnock, which claims to be the most hiked mountain in North America, you might wonder if a national wildlife refuge located nearby might offer similar opportunities for mountain hiking, cross country skiing and snow shoeing? And so it does! The final four miles of the 21 mile-long Wapack Trail travels through the refuge, passing over the summit of North Pack Monadnock Mountain, on the way to its northern trailhead (and terminus) located on Old Mountain Road in Greenfield. The refuge recently built a very nice parking lot adjacent to this trailhead.

A staff work trip to Wapack took place in mid-October. Our work focused on making needed improvements to some of the trail signage. A new and improved refuge web site will "go live" this fall. A revised trail guide, with geo-rectified map, is in the works and will be available through the web site. Finally, "QR Code" placards, which will allow refuge visitors with smart phones to access the refuge web site (and trail guide!), will soon be added to existing refuge signage. All of these improvements will further contribute to visitor safety and enjoyment.



Wooded trail through Wapack NWR.

You can visit the Wapack National Wildlife Refuge in person or via the web site: http://www.fws.gov/refuge/wapack/.

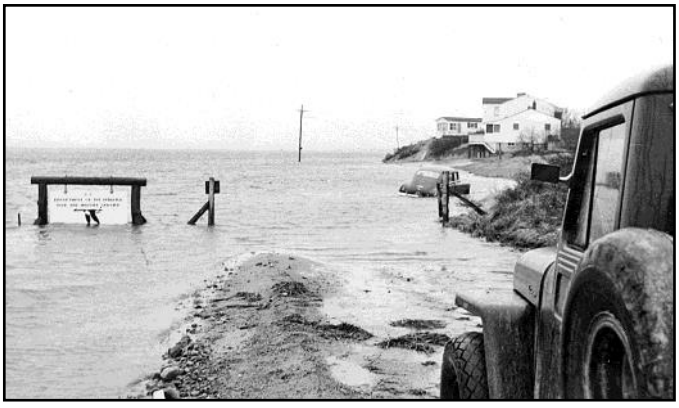
Engineering marvels: creating the roads and impoundments

By Alix McCandle, Kate Murray and Karen Stahle—refuge volunteers who comprise "The Archive Team."

If you are reading *The Wrack Line*, you are probably familiar with the Parker River National Wildlife Refuge—its barrier beach, uplands, maritime forests, and salt marshes. You may have explored Hellcat Swamp, walked the cross-dike between the North and South Pools, or perhaps taken the Behind the Scenes Tour down the dike on the eastern edge of the Plum Island Sound. The archive team is learning about those dikes, why they were made, who made them, and how it was done, and about the road building, water management decisions, selective tree planting, and more.

For the most part, today's Refuge has the look of unblemished nature, its evolution dictated by wind and water alone. But over the years since the refuge was established in 1941, there have been strategic manipulations of the terrain designed to enhance its appeal to migratory birds traveling the Atlantic Flyway, extending from northern Canada to the deep reaches of the southern hemisphere. The North and South Pools, the fresh water impoundment and road at Stage Island, the terracing and maintenance of Cross Farm Hill, even the positioning of the Refuge Road are all examples of deliberate planning and construction. In 1947, writing about the Parker River Refuge, Rachel Carson writes, "[It] is trying an interesting experiment in the management of the northern coastal marsh, building up potential nesting sites in the marshes by creating artificial 'islands' which will rise above the level of the highest tides." From the North Pool Overlook look to your right to see such an island.

For years the refuge staff was comprised of four full time workers — three in the field and one in the office. As Federal employees, they all had very specific job descriptions, but unofficially the orders were to get done whatever needed doing and with the equipment (usually surplus) and the money (never much) available. And so they became creative, resourceful, and inventive. And they moved mountains.



The refuge road, flooded by a storm on April 15, 1953.

The newly built maintenance barn, circa 1955.

Road Building

The original refuge road was created by common use. We followed in the tracks of those who went before, usually a clammer or farmer mowing the salt marsh hay. This meant the single lane path traveled down the Sound side of the island, where protective dunes were few. A storm tide met little resistance and frequently the entrance to the refuge became impassable.

Road construction became a priority not only to minimize the amount of staff time used for travel, repair of equipment, and hauling and replacing of fill, but also to reduce the expanding disturbance to the wildlife and terrain. In 1952 a 75-car parking lot was built near the entrance gate and three miles of gravel road (supplemented with scrap leather from the local shoe shops) was laid to the current location of the maintenance barns. At this time, the road was repositioned away from the fragile salt marsh. Over the years, the road was extended to Camp Sea Haven with money appropriated by the Great and General Court in 1955, raised (with funding help from Newbury in 1956),

A car stuck on the refuge beach, circa 1961.

and lengthened again in 1959 from Stage Island to Bar Head with help from the Massachusetts Parks Division. To facilitate access to the fertile fields of Cross Farm Hill, a road was built from there northward to meet the Refuge Road. Designated parking areas also became necessary to keep visitors off the fragile dunes and to reduce the frequent need to tow vehicles hub cap deep in soft sand. Originally numbering fifteen, there are now seven parking lots on the refuge.

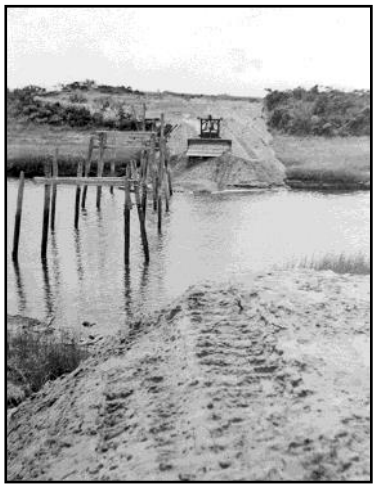
Off-road vehicles line up on the refuge beach in 1994.

North and South Pools

By far the most impactful alterations of the landscape occurred around the fresh water impoundments, pools artificially created to exclude salt water: the North Pool, the South Pool (later named for well-known refuge biologist Bill Forward), and at Stage Island. The intent was to create habitat that would attract migratory waterfowl and encourage their remaining to nest. And it worked. From the time of the Refuge's opening in the early 1940s until the completion of the dikes creating the pools in the early 1950s, the ducks using the area increased from 2,100 to 22,000. The dike at Stage Island not only created the fresh water pool, but also made easily accessible the fields that had been planted and mowed for migratory birds, reducing by seven miles the ride around Bar Head.

If you take the Behind the Scenes Tour, the refuge van will travel down a manmade dike on the westernmost edge of Plum Island. You will cross over a perpendicular dike (where the North Pool Overlook observation area is located) and there, on the left, is the start of the North Pool. This fresh water impoundment extends down to the Hellcat Swamp area where you travel over a second perpendicular dike (the Cross Dike under which a 2' pipe with an open/shut valve connects the two bodies of water) and past the observation tower. Now the pool on your left is the South Pool**,** which extends down to the open fields near the Pines Trail. Below here, the salt marsh remains unaltered.

The building of these dikes, initially completed about 1950,



Stage Island Pool dike under construction, 1954

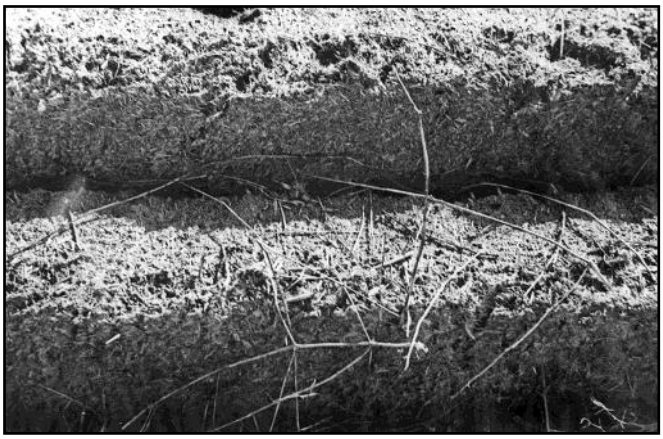
Note the two distant trees, sometimes called the “Bear and Pea” or “Comma and Period.” Alas, the “Bear” came down in the winter of 2011

This pump, circa 1961, installed on the cross-dike between the North and Bill Forward Pools. Notice the re-purposing of the tractor engine.

View of the Bill Forward Pool from the dike, 1968.

was no small task and the equipment available much less specialized than today's. Homegrown innovation was often required to get the job done. As an example, refuge staff designed and fabricated a “sod cutter” — a device, hauled behind a dozer, that cut long strips of sod that were ultimately used to stabilize the dike’s bank. The routine care of the dikes is ongoing; only once in its 65 year life span (in 1988) did the cross-dike need rebuilding.

Refuge staff planted native grasses on dike banks to stabilize the soil and sand.



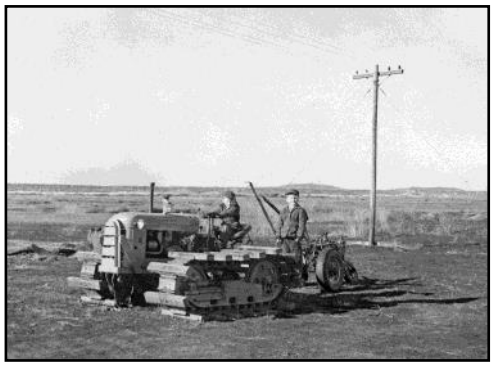
Close-up of plowed marsh sod, 1952.

Maintenance and rebuilding of the North Pool dike in 1988.

Then and Now

The refuge maintenance staff became enormously inventive in re-making equipment to do a wet-marsh or sandy-beach specific job. The "cattail crusher," used to remove unwanted rushes, consisted of three 5-gallon drums filled with water (for weight), hitched to a telephone pole. To smooth the seed beds of crops planted on Stage Island and Cross Farm Hill, 12" x 12" beams were bolted together creating a huge mat which, when dragged behind a tractor, smooth the tilled earth very effectively. A front end loader with its bucket filled smoothed the sand nicely when run backwards down the beach. And the standard construction equipment was pressed into service for unusual practices and rescues as well.

Equipment serves many uses, here removing a wrecked sailboat.



Tractor with homemade wooden treads for improved marsh navigation.

The unevenness of the terrain warranted the construction of a homemade roll bar.

As with any evolution, some former refuge management “best practices" eventually became discredited or fell out of favor. DDT and soil sterilants are no longer used. Planting acres of crops (millet, winter rye, buckwheat) to attract ducks was discontinued at Parker River. Ditching to drain the marshes, once widely believed to cut down on mosquitoes, is now actually known to increase mosquito breeding. Back in 1963, blasting (carried out by the National Guard) to create pools in which larva-eating fish could survive year 'round, was tried on Nelsons Island, now also a discredited practice.

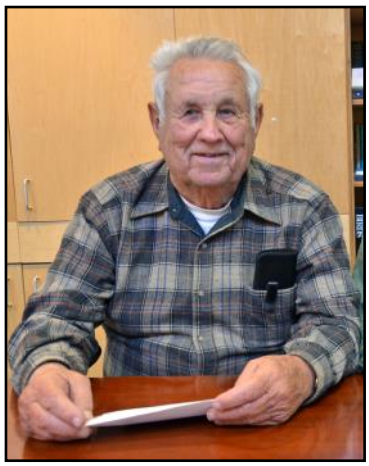
Blasting pools with dynamite in the salt marsh to create wildlife habitat.

Arial photograph of the Nelson’s Island area. Notice the regularly spaced perfect circles of blasted saltmarsh pools.

Fire is a helpful tool for habitat management.

In 1953 6500 Japanese Black Pines were planted on the upland dunes. While these trees have been immensely effective in building up the dunes, they are not indigenous and have overrun the native Pitch Pine that is now being reintroduced. At one time controlled burns were a regular part of habitat management. Falling out of favor for a period of time, regular burning of surface vegetation is being reintroduced in many locations as an effective land management tool. The maintenance of native pitch pine habitat requires fire to open its cones to release the seeds therein.

Thank you!



The archive team is indebted to Tom Stubbs, maintenance man, inventor, sometime law enforcement officer, practical engineer, farmer, and “jack of all trades” who worked at the Refuge from 1947 to 1987. Tom has an extraordinary memory, recalling in detail building projects and maintenance procedures of the past. He has been generous with his time, demonstrating a patient willingness to explain to the less imaginative how to float heavy machinery across water, how to manually but efficiently beat down invasive plants, and how to single handedly extract a toppled dozer from a ditch. Tom earned the respect of nine refuge managers and dozens of colleagues, He rightfully looks back on his productive refuge career with fondness.

Parker River NWR QR codes!

Scan this “QR” code with your smart phone to quickly link to the Parker River National Wildlife Refuge webpage. Little squares like this will be popping up on signs all over the refuge to help you connect with information for your visit.

Parker River

Henry Henderson (1831–1888)

Where the First Settlers of Newbury Landed
in September, 1634 (Excerpt)

Through broad gleaming meadows of billowy grass,
That forms at its outlet a long narrow pass,
The river comes down
By farms whose high tillage gives note to the town,
As sparkling and bright
As it gladdened the sight
Of the fathers who first found its beautiful shore,
And felt here was home,—they need wander no more.

When the swallows were gathering in flocks for their flight,
As if conscious some foe of their kind were in sight,
They pushed up the stream
In the low level rays of the sun's lingering beam,
That lit all below
With a magical glow,
That brought by resemblance old England to mind,
Whose shores they had left with such heart-ache behind.

The golden-rod waved its bright plumes from the bank,
As if all the sunshine of summer it drank,
And grapes full and fair
Their wild native fragrance flung out on the air;
And asters, and all
The gay flowerets of fall
That lengthen the season's long dreamy delight,
We're crowding the woodside their beauty made bright.

In the soft sunny days of September they came,
When the trees here and there were alight with the flame
That betokens decay
And the passing of summer in glory away;
As if the great Cause
Of Nature's grand laws
Had set his red signet that here should be stayed
The tide of the year in its pomp and parade.

And now, as I stand on this broad open height,
And take in the view with enraptured delight,
I feel as they felt
Who in fervor of soul by these bright waters knelt,
That here I could rest
In the consciousness blest
That Nature has given all heart, hand, or eye
Could crave for contentment that earth can supply;—

The limitless ocean that stretches away
Beyond the bright islets that light up the bay,
The murmurous roar
Of the surf breaking in on the long line of shore,
And rivers that run
Like gold in the sun,
And broad sunny hillsides and bright breezy groves,
And all one instinctively longs for and loves.

Trees bending with fruit touched with tints of the morn,
Fields soft with the late springing verdure unshorn,
And glimpses so fair
Of city and river and sails here and there,
And cottages white
On the beach by the light,—
The picturesque roadside, and vistas that seem
Like openings to fairy-land seen but in dream.

*****

Adieu, gentle river! though long I may wait
Ere here I shall stand at the day's golden gate,
And take in the view
That brings back the past as so old and so new;
Yet memory will still
Haunt this storied old hill
Whence I see as in vision the prospect unrolled
In all the bright splendor of purple and gold.

Photo: Matt Poole/FWS

Meet Volunteer Janet Hickey

By Jean Adams, Outdoor Recreation Planner

Janet Hickey started her volunteer stint in January of 2012 as a participant in the Master Naturalist Program. After retiring at the end of that year, she took Parker River by storm and volunteered for a plethora of activities. In fact, it's easier to list what Janet hasn't helped out with here at Parker River than to list what she has done (her "can and will do" list is very long)!

Recently, I asked Janet if she would take some time out of her busy volunteer and personal schedule to answer some questions regarding her time here at Parker River NWR and she was kind enough to do so:

What did you do before you started to volunteer?
Although educated as a geologist, my career path with a large materials engineering/manufacturing company led me into management positions (as often happens). I enjoyed working, but there were too many hours behind a desk, in meetings, on conference calls, and on airplanes. I spent a lot of my free time at Parker River -- biking, walking, birding or boating -- I feel so much more "at home" here.

What do you do as a volunteer at Parker River? What is your favorite job ?
For the past year or so, I've been the leader for most Behind the Scenes Tours on Saturday mornings, and I love doing it. All of the people who sign up to come on the tour know more than I do about ***something,*** and I never know what I'm going to learn about next. I've had everything from college students on their first dates, to professional photographers and ornithologists, and even older folks who have lived on Plum Island their entire lives and never set foot on the Wildlife Refuge. There's nothing I like more than introducing the PRNWR to people who have never been here, and hearing them talk among themselves about what a treasure we have. When they come away with an appreciation for the need to protect and preserve the habitats, I know I've done my job.

I've co-led kayak tours – always fun and sometimes challenging I've also co-led tide pooling sessions, and a bike tour; we only got one bike tour going this year, but I hope it will pick up interest, as bicycles are a great way to enjoy the refuge with multiple senses. I've volunteered to join the biologists when they've needed an extra body to help with their projects, such as counting tern eggs during nesting season. I've gone with Jean out on the beach to install mile marker stakes before the beach closure, and I've helped her pull up miles of symbolic fencing after the beach has reopened. Picking up the bags of trash collected during Beach Clean-ups is fun and interesting – it is amazing what stuff is found out there on a beach that has been untouched for 5 months. I've also made a commitment to (try to) drive the "new" 14 passenger bus – watch out! There's pretty much nothing I won't sign up for (at least once) if I'm available.

Volunteer Janet Hickey loads up the Ranger at a chilly Coast Sweep beach clean-up.

Any favorite memories that stand out?
Perhaps the most surprising volunteer opportunity came about last fall when I was asked if I wanted to work on re-writing the trail marker descriptions on the Ferry Way Trail at the Great Bay NWR. The trail was going to be renamed in honor of William Furber, who lived on land which is now part of the GBNWR in the late 1600s, and operated a ferry at Ferry Point where the trail comes out to the Great Bay overlook. This ferry was the first to bring passengers, goods and livestock across the Great Bay from Newington to Durham NH. Coincidentally, I am a direct descendent of William Furber, and I was proud to be on hand at the Furber Family Reunion and Dedication Ceremony of the William Furber Ferry Way Trail, in honor of William's 400th birth year.

Do you volunteer elsewhere?
I have been involved with Opportunity Works as a volunteer and a board member since I first moved to Newburyport (1986) . I've also recently taken a volunteer role at the Merrimack River Feline Rescue Society.

Any advice to other volunteers?
Don't be shy about signing up to volunteer for anything, even if you aren't sure of yourself. Each of the staff members at PRNWR is great to work with – willing to teach what you may not know, and always appreciative. We are lucky to have this special place and good people to give us the opportunity to make our tiny little mark in the world.

We here at Parker River are VERY lucky to have Janet as a volunteer. Her excellent attitude and enthusiasm is infectious and inspiring and we hope that Janet continues to volunteer for the refuge for many years to come. She's a gem and quite literally a "Janet of all trades."
Thank you, Janet !

Photo Camp Update

By Matt Poole, Visitor Services Manager

2014 Photo Camp participants

The third convening of the refuge's annual Nature Photography Day Camp took place during the second week of July. Eleven teens spent five days learning and practicing the fundamentals of photography and image editing. The kids spent the first morning of camp in the visitor center classroom "trying to wrap their heads around" such technical topics as "depth of field" and the "exposure triangle." As the primary instructor, and with not a few of these camps "under my belt," I knew that in order to avert that "summer vacation-induced glazed eye look," I needed to give the kids fun ways to practice what I was attempting to teach. So, they photographed fuzzy tennis balls positioned on traffic cones at different aperture settings (to understand the artistic value of manipulating depth of field). They also took pictures of another instructor juggling the same tennis balls (to understand how to freeze or blur motion by using variable shutter speeds). That was the extent of the classroom approach; after this lesson, we went "out to the field".

For the remainder of the week, the kids and "us adults" – I was joined throughout the week by Photo Society board member Tony Contarino and wildlife photographer Peter Christoph – participated in a number of photo safaris to locations that included the Center for Wildlife (in York, ME - to photograph live raptors); The Butterfly Place (Westford, MA); Maudsley State Park (Newburyport); and Halibut Point State Park (Rockport, MA). We even managed to have lunch and photograph in the rain at Nubble Light (York, ME). Each location provided unique opportunities to shoot wildlife, landscape, and macro images – the core of what was taught and practiced.

Also at different times throughout the week the kids practiced their image-editing skills. This year's camp required the campers to bring their own laptop computers. I had to find and provide a free image editing software program that could be loaded on both Windows and Apple computers. And there aren't many of those around! I finally settled on GIMP – a free "open source" program that is as robust as Photoshop.

Photo camper hard at work.

As always happens during the final hours on the final day of the camp, the kids worked feverishly to select and edit their favorite dozen or so images of the week. These are the "portfolio collections" from which I ultimately select the one image for each camper that will be printed, matted, and framed for display in the refuge visitor. Check out the exhibition next time you find yourself at the visitor center. As happens each time we run a camp, the images they produce are impressive!

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